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ABSTRACT

This study examined preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about their elementary language arts teaching after being prepared in a Professional Development School (PDS). Participants were preservice teachers in the first semester of their field-based senior year of teacher preparation, all of whom were placed in one of several PDS clusters. Each attended methods classes, including language arts, on an elementary school campus, allowing university instructors to model lessons using classrooms at various grade levels. Preservice teachers also taught language arts lessons while university instructors observed and provided feedback. Two days per week, student teachers were assigned to the classroom of a teacher, where they were active aides and gradually increased their activities to teaching short lessons. They were required to prepare and participate in various language arts lessons using different methods with small peer groups and elementary students. Participants completed a teaching efficacy belief instrument at the beginning and end of the semester. Results indicated that the PDSs were successful training sites for elementary language arts teachers. Preservice teachers made positive judgments about how well they could execute the necessary sequence of actions toward goal attainment in teaching language arts. (Contains 32 references.) (SM)

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Professional Development Site Schools: A Great Place for Training Elementary Language Arts Preservice Teachers

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" The most powerful of all human attributes is language. Through language we come to know, to organize, and ultimately to control our world; we give form to our experiences, thoughts, and emotions; we share ourselves with others and form the relationships that shape our lives" (Temple & Gillet, 1984).

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"The beliefs teachers hold have been shown to mediate their perceptions, judgments, and classroom behavior, and have been linked to students' beliefs, behavior, and achievement," Hebert, *et al* (1998, p. 215) note in their study on teacher education students' sense of efficacy. It may follow, therefore, that part of producing excellent preservice teachers may have a great deal to do with helping them establish a better sense of self-efficacy (Ramey-Gassert & Shroyer, 1992), particularly in the various subject areas where they may instruct as elementary school teachers.

But what is the best teacher education format to help preservice teachers gain this needed sense of efficacy? Certainly, one arrangement to be considered is more and earlier clinical experiences. Calls for teacher education to move into professional Professional Development Sites (where the clinical experiences are increased) have come from many directions (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Shanker, 1996; Wise & Leibbrand, 1996). Unequivocally, those colleges and universities who are accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) are "expected to enter into partnerships with the schools, thereby linking preparation and practice more closely than even before" (Wise & Leibbrand, 1996, p. 204). Teitel (1996) states that the numbers of PDSs have increased throughout the 1990s. This may be because they provide teacher education with an "exemplary learning environment that is capable of transforming both teacher preparation and the schooling of children...." (Million & Vare, p. 711).

Improvement of teacher education in general has been applauded through these on-site school/ university partnerships, but there have also been concerns for the improvement of preservice teacher training in many subject areas as well (Bybee, 1993; National Research Council, 1996; Sivertsen, 1993). In science, for example, the science education of preservice elementary school teachers is seen as a "critical component in the systemic approach necessary to make real and lasting change a classroom reality" (Raizen, 1994, p. 7). Richardson and Morgan (1997) support more effective education for prospective teachers in methodology for reading and language arts as well as other content areas, noting that more exposure to training will help teaching at higher levels of language and literacy. Calls have also been made for better language arts training to highlight the existing gap between what teachers need and what they have been given (Moats, 1999). This training, according to Moats, should provide candidates with a rigorous theory- and practice-based

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program for a range of skills and knowledge, as well as the need for licensing authorities to assess that knowledge using validated, reliable assessments for the classroom. The importance of teaching language arts is noted through time in education. Temple and Gillet (1984) summarize this by stating:

> As director and orchestrater of the language arts program, the elementary classroom teacher stands at the center of the entire curriculum--a position that implies an awesome responsibility because instruction does not end when the basal readers are put away, nor does it wane in importance as children progress to upper grades and beyond. Like language itself, it fills the entire school day, pervading every other subject and activity. Learning to teach language arts means learning to teach everything else too (p. 3).

Enochs and Riggs (1990) have developed an instrument that is used to measure preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in science as a follow up to work on the impact of efficacy on classroom behaviors (Ashton, 1984; Gibson & Dembro, 1984). By conducting *this* study as a parallel in language arts, we hoped to help assess the effectiveness of a site-based teacher education program with respect to self-efficacy in the teaching of elementary language arts. The body of knowledge on the many merits of PDSs is still small. However, by assessing in this area, teacher educators can begin to determine whether this format for teacher training (PDSs) can contribute to more positive efficacy beliefs in the teaching of language arts and, thus, be of greater value for preservice teachers.

Methods

Program Description

This university's undergraduate teacher education program is field-based during its entire senior year. During the junior year students enter the college of education and begin their preprofessional development work following core course work required by the state. For preprofessional development, courses include technology for teachers, a multicultural course, educational psychology, art for teachers, content area reading, and health for teachers. In addition, students may select and begin course work for a specialization within the college such as Reading Specialization, Early Childhood or Bilingual Education, or they may continue to work on a subject area specialization in another college.

The final year is divided into two field-based semesters: the Professional Development Semester and Student Teaching. During the Professional Development semester, a student is placed in one of six-to-seven Professional Development Sites (PDSs) around a large metropolitan area. Each site is selected for its multicultural mix of students and its lower socioeconomic conditions, coupled with its district's reputation for being a school that strives to meet our philosophies about teaching. These PDSs are usually a cluster of two to four schools whose

preservice teachers come together at one of the schools for university courses. The selected elementary schools PDSs are normally elementary schools partnered with an intermediate and/or a junior high school, depending on the grade level interests of the preservice teachers in the PDS each semester. University professors teach courses in the following areas at one or more of the schools in a cluster rather than at the university: introduction to teaching, mathematics methods, language arts methods, science methods, and social studies methods. When preservice teachers are not attending classes, they are placed with a teacher in a classroom for active observation and beginning teaching experiences. This field-based commitment is four and one half days a week during this semester for elementary preservice teachers, during which time they follow a teacher's day. In addition to assignments that require individual preservice teacher classroom interaction with teachers and students, university instructors often schedule classroom demonstrations using students of the PDS. Preservice teachers design and teach an interdisciplinary unit during this time. The culminating event is an oral portfolio presentation that preservice teachers have created from their experiences. The audience is their school mentor, their instructors, and often their friends, family, and principal(s).

The second part of this year is the student teaching semester. During this 14-week semester preservice teachers are placed with a mentor teacher at a school and monitored by a university supervisor. Preservice teachers gradually take over the teaching and professional requirements of the regular classroom teacher. A 14-week placement or two seven-week placements may be requested, depending on interests and requirements of the preservice teacher's particular subject area specialization(s). A professional portfolio is constructed for interview purposes, while the working portfolio is continued.

Participants

Participants (n = 48 for group 1; n = 68 for group 2) were preservice teachers in the first semester of their field-based senior year of teacher preparation (semester preceding student teaching). All were placed in one of six-to-seven PDS clusters described above. Each attended methods classes (12 hours per week), including language arts on an elementary school campus, allowing university instructors to model lessons using classrooms at various grade levels. It was also prescribed for preservice teachers to teach language arts lessons while university instructors observed and offered feedback. Two days per week, students were assigned to the classroom of a teacher, where they served as active aides and gradually increased their activities from helping small groups of children to teaching short language arts lessons separately and later in an integrated thematic unit. Preservice students were required to prepare and participate in a number of language arts lessons using various methods during the semester with small peer groups and elementary students.

Limitations

Several university methods instructors/professors in this program instruct multiple clusters.

However, there are instructors who are unique to the cluster, so instructor differences between clusters may play a role in the results. The "personality" of each PDS, as well as the individual school and the mentor teacher's personality, also may have an effect on how much the preservice teacher was able to be involved in the classroom and see positive modeling in language arts. Finally, the emphasis on the state test for Texas students on basic skills (TAAS) also impacts the time preservice teachers spend in active teaching and observing actual lessons in the spring semester. Often teachers are so busy reviewing skills that new materials/lessons are rarely introduced directly prior to the test administration. This may have had an effect on differences between semesters.

Procedures

The Science Teaching Efficacy Belief Instrument (STEBI-B)(Enochs & Riggs, 1990), modified for language arts, was administer to measure preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. During the first two weeks of the semester, this 23-item survey was given with levels of agreement from (5) "strongly agree" to (1) "strongly disagree" on a five-point scale. This same instrument was given as a post survey during the last week of the semester. Two constructs were measured as defined by Bandura's (1977) theory--a Language Arts Outcome Expectancy Scale (STOE) and a Personal Teaching Efficacy Scale (PSTE) in Language Arts.

Results/Conclusions The pretest and posttest of the modified STEBI-B were analyzed for significance in mean score differences. Results yielded significance in the following items seen in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. Significant Items (Spring)

**Scores for items are shown as reversed/recoded.

	Means (n=48)			
	Pre	Post	t	prob.
1. When a student does better than usual in language arts, it is often because the teacher exerted a little extra effort.	2.54	3.24	4.04	.0001
2. I will continually find better ways to teach language arts.	3.54	3.75	1.97	.05
5. I know the steps necessary to teach language arts concepts effectively.	2.41	3.18	4.65	.0001
**8. I will generally teach language arts ineffectively.	1.71	4.15	20.17	.0001
11. When a low-achieving child progresses in language arts, it is usually due to extra attention given by the teacher.	1.63	3.86	-11.36	.0001
12. I understand language arts concepts well enough to be effective in teaching elementary language arts.	2.94	3.51	4.21	.0001

**19. I wonder if I will have the necessary skills to teach language arts.	1.89	2.41	-2.71	.0007
**21. When a student has difficulty understanding language arts concept, I will usually be at a loss as to how to help the student understand it better.	1.73	2	-1.95	.05
**23. I do not know what to do to turn students on to language arts.	1.50	2.32	-4.90	.0001

Table 2 Significant Items Only (Fall)

**Scores for items are shown as reversed/recoded as for scales.

	Means (n=68)			
	Pre	Post	t	prob.
1. When a student does better than usual in language arts, it is often because the teacher exerted a little extra effort.	3.65	4.06	2.39	.01
5. I know the steps necessary to teach language arts concepts effectively.	2.92	4.10	7.55	.0001
12. I understand language arts concepts well enough to be effective in teaching elementary language arts.	3.25	4.24	7.81	.0001
**13. Increased effort in language arts teaching produces little change in some students' language arts achievement.	2.25	2.43	1.93	.05
18. I will typically be able to answer students' language arts questions.	3.88	4.20	3.83	.0003
**19. I wonder if I will have the necessary skills to teach language arts.	2.15	3.13	5.79	.0001
**20. Given a choice, I will not invite the principal to evaluate my language arts lesson.	2.83	3.25	3.53	.0008
**23. I do not know what to do to turn students on to language arts.	2.59	3.20	5.02	.0001

Language Arts Scales (for Table 2)

Overall items (23) Pre/Post t-test: (Significant)	3.248	3.514	3.02	.0064*
Self-Efficacy Scale (Significant)	3.049	3.514	4.05	.0016*
Outcome Scale (Non-significant)	3.517	3.5053	.771	.8577

Nine items were found to be significantly different on the first groups' administration, seven of which are items on the Personal Teaching Efficacy Belief Scale. Eight items were found significant for the second group's administration, six of which are found on the Personal Teaching Efficacy Belief Scale. Significant differences were found both in terms of overall items and on the Personal Language Arts Teaching Efficacy Scale for the second group's administration. The Language Arts Outcome Scale was not significant. Outcome efficacy can be referred to as the belief in how well students can actually be taught, given limitations such as their family situation, school conditions, academic ability and so forth, while personal self-efficacy is characterized as a belief in one's own ability as a teacher to bring about positive student change and motivation (Gibson & Dembro, 1984). Therefore, preservice teachers make positive "judgments about how well they can execute the necessary sequence of actions toward goal attainment" here in teaching language arts (Wong, 1997).

Discussion and Educational Implications

Self-efficacy beliefs, or perceived performance capability, seem to form an important part of views towards teaching that, in turn, have an effect on the way teachers go about their instruction, their students' outcomes, and overall satisfaction with a teaching career (Ashton, 1985; Ashton & Webb, 1986). Hebert *et al* show that efficacy is certainly related to experience. The blend, therefore, of theory and practice provided by PDSs seems to be a positive one, as numerous experiences contributed to the increase in language arts teaching efficacy. Bandura's belief is that experience is the main rationale of self-efficacy. In the four areas identified by Bandura as sources of information used to determine self-efficacy (mastery experiences, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and positive emotional tone) all appeared in the PDS. These areas also support part of Denham and Michael's research that show professional preparation and experiences in the classroom--as well as characteristics of their workplaces could have an effect on efficacy.

With respect to Bandura's work, four areas proved to be important in the PDS experience. For example, authentic performances (past successes or failures) were shown during university instruction modeled with borrowed real classrooms, when small groups of preservice teachers taught example lessons, and when preservice teachers designed and taught lessons with real students with the support of university instructors. The use of elementary students at various grade levels is not often available in university-held classrooms. Also, each lesson was carefully supported and aimed at success by all of those involved in the PDS experience--university professors and mentor teachers. Further, PDSs are selected in multicultural, lower SES areas, so preservice teachers are experiencing early success with children who may or may not be like them. Finally, sites were screened for like-minded philosophies, so that these performances were by-and-large based on best practices.

Vicarious experiences, (observation of others succeeding or failing) also an essential part of

obtaining self-efficacy for Bandura, was provided by seeing classroom teachers interact with elementary students in their assigned activities. These observations helped expand the preservice teacher vision and identity of themselves as "teachers" of language arts throughout the semester. In addition, in methods classes preservice teachers watched each other often teaching language arts individually and as a small group. This also enhances research done by Schunk (1996) who notes that observation of *similar* models affects self-efficacy with the idea of, "Well, if they can do it, so can I!"

Verbal or social persuasion (encouragement of others) was also a strong component of being in a PDS. The relationship established with the mentor teacher was one that provided a great deal of verbal support. Preservice teachers were encouraged to work with students in small groups until they were ready to take over teaching a unit in which language arts was a major required element. University subject area instructors as well as instructors in generic teaching issues and mentor teachers provided written and oral verbal persuasion in evaluating the lesson designs and performance with children. Another related area of self-efficacy research by Graham and Weiner (1996) states that self-efficacy increases when students receive rewards based on *performance*, as performance rewards signal increasing competence. Preservice teachers in PDSs receive feedback rewards during the entire semester in various performance situations. Again, these were verbal, as well as performance rating sheets. Yet another essential area provided by the PDS was support provided by a peer cohort assigned to one PDS--all classes are taken together and much positive socialization and encouragement occurred during the course of the semester. Preservice teachers were asked during the semester to reciprocally observe each other, rate each other, and debrief using a performance scale in addition to peer coaching. These were always very verbally supportive.

Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) stress, however, that efficacy grows from *real* success with students rather than *only* the "moral support or cheerleading of professors and colleagues" (Woolfolk, p. 394), and advises education students that any experience or training that helps success in the day-to-day task of teaching will provide a foundation for developing a sense of efficacy in a career. The PDS experience provides opportunities early on not only for "cheerleading" but also for actual success for preservice teachers in the workplace with five university professors, a mentor teacher, and a supportive school. Wong believes that "teachers can build up their self-efficacy if they are afforded a safe environment in which to reflect upon their use of newly validated teaching approaches/strategies" (p. 484) where supportive and honest discussion emerges.

Psychological states (positive emotional tones) were also noted in the PDS. Because many preservice teachers viewed the PDS experiences as a beginning of a career rather than another set of courses, there are higher expectations and increased psychological states. Many knew that recommendations from their PDS would bring quick job offers and many wanted to stay in their site for student teaching. Emphasis of the semester was on cooperation of all cohort members. Yet another part of the positive PDS experience is reflective in nature. Messages that are a point of discussion in the topic of reflective teaching read:

"Failure? No, just another opportunity to learn for the next time,"
"Every lesson should be (for the teacher) an inquiry or a quiet form of research,"
and
"By regarding an 'imperfection' in the student NOT as a defect in the pupil but as a missing part in one's own abilities at the moment, we can concentrate on discovering the answers to fill those gaps."

This supports Covington (1992) and Covington and Omelick (1984, 1987) on mastery-oriented students who have high self-efficacy. They are not fearful of failure because it does not threaten self-worth. Instead, it offers a chance to take risks, seek feedback, and gain more skill.

The positive conclusions found in this study suggest success for PDS schools as training centers for teachers-to-be of language arts. Future studies are needed to follow the long-term effects, especially concerning classroom behaviors on participants as they continue in their careers in teaching language arts. However, this evidence seems to point to a positive trend in having preservice self-efficacy beliefs impact the teaching of language arts. Though Bandura's (1993) and Zimmerman's research (1995) we know that if self-efficacy is high, we will set higher goals, be less afraid of failure, and persist longer. We believe that PDS preservice teachers who enter teaching with a higher self-efficacy will, thus, begin their careers as more exemplary teachers in these areas and be more apt to stay in the teaching profession. In addition, Slammer (1995) found that those who have high self-efficacy are more motivated to achieve and tend to be more healthy mentally and physically, while Bandura (1993) and Zimmerman (1995) agree that if self-efficacy is low, a person is likely to give up easily or avoid tasks altogether, and Ross (1995) adds that, as teachers, they will tend to maintain the status quo and to select instruction that prevents noise and confusion. Again, this would hopefully help teacher persistence and retention. Woolfolk maintains that, "Self-efficacy theory predicts that teachers with a high sense of efficacy work harder and persist longer even when students are difficult to teach in part because these teachers believe in themselves and in their students (p. 393). Further study would add to this limited field of knowledge in the area of self-efficacy in language arts teaching .

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